

The Foolish Cross – Part 2

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1 Corinthians 1:18-31 *18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (NIV)*

In Florida , an atheist became incensed over the preparation of Easter and Passover holidays. He decided to contact his lawyer about the discrimination inflicted on atheists by the constant celebrations afforded to Christians and Jews with all their holidays while **atheists had no holiday** to celebrate. The case was brought before a judge. After listening to the long passionate presentation by the lawyer, the judge banged his gavel and declared, 'Case Dismissed!' The lawyer stood and objected: 'Your honor, how can you dismiss this case? Christians have Easter, Christmas and many other observances. Jews have Passover, Yom Kippur and Hanukkah...yet my client and other atheists have no holiday!' The judge leaned forward in his chair and simply said, 'Obviously your client is too confused to even know about, much less celebrate, his own holiday!' The lawyer said, 'your Honor, we are unaware of any holiday for atheists. Just when might that holiday be?' The judge replied, 'Well it comes every year on the same date---April 1st! Our calendar sets April 1st as 'April Fools Day,' and Psalm 14:1 states, 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God.' Thus, in my opinion, if your client says there is no God, then by scripture, he is a fool, and April 1st is his holiday! Now, have a good day and get out of my courtroom!!

In 1996 the **Taco Bell** Corporation announced that it had bought the Liberty Bell and was renaming it the Taco Liberty Bell. Hundreds of outraged citizens called the National Historic Park in Philadelphia where the bell was housed to express their anger. Their nerves were calmed only when Taco Bell revealed a few hours later, that it was all a practical joke. The best line of the day came when White House press secretary Mike McCurry was asked about the sale. Thinking on his feet, he responded that the Lincoln Memorial had also been sold. It would now be known as the Ford Lincoln Mercury Memorial.

There is a lot of foolishness in the world. And as we discussed last week, many people think the message of **the cross** is foolishness. When you look at a cross, what do you see? Do you see a cross for what it really is? When you look at this is it an instrument of death? Do you see it as a punishment for criminals? I would guess that most of you identify the cross as the symbol of your salvation, but that is not what everyone sees. To some it is nothing more than a decoration or a nice piece of jewelry. They don't associate it with a death that made payment for sin. Even if they did, it would not make any sense to them. Death on a cross was not something to boast about. It was a shameful thing, execution in its crudest form. A humiliating death in the eyes of the world seems to be foolish and ridiculous. Why would anyone rejoice in that? Yet it is that foolish death that gives us life.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. So many in this world think it is "moronic" for us to believe that something good came out of someone dying on a cross. But let's consider the **Wisdom of the World**:

- Those who think themselves wise tell us to be tolerant of those who live in unnatural sexual relationships. We should be loving toward them, yes, but that doesn't mean we should condone sinful behavior.
- We live in a world where a man who shoots a pregnant woman is charged with two murders, the mother and the unborn child, but a woman who decides to kill her unborn child in the womb maintains it is her own body, that it is not really a life and can be disposed of with no consequences. It is her right to choose.
- The wisdom of this world tells us that the earth is billions of years old, that men just happened to evolve from lower species by a series of fortunate accidents and occurrences.

- The wisdom of this world first tells us that Global warming is melting the polar ice caps and then says we are heading for another Ice Age.

Granted, not all wisdom of the world is that convoluted, but much of it is. And this is part of the thinking of those who claim to be intelligent and wise and who tell Christians they are morons for believing anything good could come from a death on a cross. They tinge us foolish, uninformed creatures because we believe the Scriptures and what happened on the cross at Calvary. But that was all part of God's plan. He did not come to save man according to man's ideas or plans. He did it His way. Those outside of faith just don't get it. Those who have not been led by the Spirit of Christ to see and believe that what took place on the cross was the payment for their sins will think it is foolish. That is because it must be spiritually discerned. Paul writes of this later in this same epistle: *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* (1 Corinthians 2:14) If you have faith in Jesus, it is only because the Spirit of God has led you away from the wisdom of the world and to the foolish message of the cross: *Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Corinthians 12:3). The message of the cross is foolishness to the world, *but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* (1 Cor. 1:18)

There are people who have heard the same Gospel message that you have heard, yet it had the opposite result. There are people today who hear this Good News, yet do not come to faith. There will be those who accept the Good News, but there will also be those that regard it as foolish. It all depends on that person's perspective. **Consider the temperature 32° Fahrenheit.** That is the freezing point of water. Yet it is also the melting point! If the temperature is falling, water will freeze at 32°. If the temperature is rising, ice will melt at 32°. The same temperature will freeze or melt. Pass it in either direction, and you will get opposite results. And so it is with people. They are exposed to the same Gospel message of Jesus as the Savior of the world. Their spiritual thermometer will either rise or fall. It is growing either warmer or colder. At the critical point, some hearts yield to the Holy Spirit, or melt, and they are numbered among the faithful. But others freeze, harden and stiffen. With a rising temperature, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. But with a falling temperature, it is a stumbling block and foolishness.

This message of the cross, as necessary as it may be, was not welcomed in Paul's world. It is not welcome in our world today, either. I read an article about a man on a long plane trip. The conversation with the couple behind him turned to spiritual matters. They were into New Age. The wife had been raised Protestant, the husband as a Jew. They said they had read parts of the New Testament and that they loved Jesus. They also loved Buddha and Mohammed. They would no doubt be considered enlightened and wise by the world's standards. How would you have responded to these people? "My, isn't that interesting" or "Oh, that's nice" would be the socially acceptable response. But this man chose to speak his faith instead. He said that he was glad they had read parts of the New Testament, but that they needed to read more. "If you had," he said, "you would know that the Jesus you say you love says to you 'If you love Me, keep my commandments.' (John 14:15). And He claimed to be the only way to salvation: 'No one comes to the Father but by Me.'" (John 14:6).

This is the message that is needed throughout the world, whether it is welcomed or not. Some say that proclaiming Christ as the exclusive means to salvation is being intolerant, disagreeable, narrow, even foolish. But as a follower of Christ, the message we proclaim will be foolish to the world. We have a command to tell the truth. The cross may sound foolish or moronic, but it is the only way to be saved. Our calling as Christians is to declare it: personally as well as through pastors and missionaries and all forms of ministry.

Only the message of the cross has the power and the wisdom of God. Only the message of the cross offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life. On Calvary, the Lord Jesus innocently suffered and died as a common criminal to pay the penalty for your sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. By God's grace you have had this foolish cross proclaimed to you.